

Warner Ranch - Ranch House
Near Warner Springs
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CAL-424

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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WARNER RANCH, RANCH HOUSE

ADDRESS: Warner Springs, San Diego County, California
OWNER: Vista Irrigation District
OCCUPANT: Vista Irrigation District
USE: Vacant

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Warner Ranch is a Registered National Historic Landmark and California Historical Landmark #311.

It was the focal point for emigrants traveling over the Santa Fe Trail to the California settlements and gold fields from 1844; and it served as a way-station for Butterfield's Overland Mail Company from September 16, 1858, until April, 1861. It was the first well supplied trading post reached by emigrants after the long trek across the southwest deserts. It figured prominently in events incident with the arrival of the Army of the West under command of General Stephen Watts Kearny during the United States war with Mexico and the Battle of San Pasqual which was the sharpest engagement in the conquest of California. During the Civil War, Camp Wright was established on the ranch for the final staging of the California Volunteer Battalion under Colonel James H. Carleton.

The buildings, extant, are of adobe brick and hand hewn timbers put together by mortise and tenon and wood pegs, typical of the early west.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Warner Ranch - legal ranch name "Rancho San Jose' del Valle" - comprising 11 leagues was first granted to Jose' Antonio Bernardino

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Pico in 1840,¹ who abandoned it in 1842 due to continuous trouble from Indians. It was regranted in 1844 to Johnathon Trumble Warner, who had become a Mexican citizen for the purpose, and assumed the name of Don Juan Jose' Warner. Complicating the title to the land, the U. S. District Court, on February 23, 1857, surprisingly reversed the Land Commission - and itself - by confirming four leagues of land (Rancho Valle de San Jose') to Silvestre de la Portilla, reinstating his neglected 1834 grant.² By this decision the Warner Ranch House and Trading Post, which was erected in 1844, was located 330 feet south of the southern boundary of Warner's property and on that of Portilla, as determined by official surveys which were not made until 1878.³

The Warner Ranch House, therefore, was included in the deed to Buena Vista Valley when Silvestre de la Portilla deeded the property to Vincenta Sepulveda de Carrillo on November 6, 1858.⁴

Warner received an additional grant of 4 leagues - Rancho Camajal y el Palomar; but it was made by Governor Pio Pico during the change-over from Mexican to American rule, and the claim was rejected after he held a cloudy title for some 20 years.⁵

After financial reverses and a long series of lawsuits and counter-suits to clear all titles to the main portions of Warner Ranch, John G. Downey became sole owner in 1880.⁶ He retained ownership until 1911 when William Griffith Henshaw acquired the entire ranch for water and power development purposes. The resort at the Springs was modernized and still is a very popular vacation spot.⁶ The vast acreage is now a part of the Vista Irrigation District holdings.

Warner was born in Connecticut on November 20, 1807; the youngest of nine children born to Seldon Warner, who's forbears migrated from England to Massachusetts in 1630, and Dorthy Seldon Warner.⁷

In 1830, at the age of 23, Warner found it necessary to move to a milder climate for his health, so migrated westward to St. Louis. There he met Jedediah Strong Smith and later signed up with a trading expedition to Santa Fe of which Smith was partner.⁸ Smith was murdered by Indians on the Cimarron. Upon reaching Santa Fe, Mr. Jackson, one of the Principals, entered into a new partnership with Dr. David Waldo and Ewing Young for the purpose of continuing on to California to purchase mules for the Louisiana market.

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Warner joined up with this party which arrived at Los Angeles on December 5, 1831. The route passed through Valle de San Jose' which left an impression on Warner.⁹ Mules were not as available from the Spanish missions as anticipated. After driving the mules they could purchase to the Colorado River, Mr. Jackson took over, with the assistance of herders, to herd the mules East. Young and Warner returned to Los Angeles and engaged in otter hunting on the Channel Islands,¹⁰ and later went on a trapping expedition up through the Central Valley of California which brought him north into Oregon.¹¹

Upon returning to Los Angeles in 1834, Warner went to work as a clerk in a store operated by Don Abel Stearns and later for John Temple. During this time he befriended Pio Pico, later Governor of California, and through this friendship courted and married Anita Gale, the daughter of an English sea captain, who had left her, at the age of five, as a ward of Pio's widowed mother, Dona Eustaquia Pico.

Warner entered into a thriving merchantile business on his own in company with Henry Mellus.¹² In 1838 an incident of significance occurred at Warner's store when soldiers arrived from Monterey to arrest Pio and Andres Pico. When refused co-operation by Warner, the soldiers attempted to arrest him, but were thwarted by the Wolfskill brothers, William and John, which cemented a life-long friendship.¹³

In 1840 Warner made a trip back to his New England homeland by way of Acapulco and Veracruz, Mexico.¹⁴ While in the East he advocated the construction of a transcontinental railroad over a southern route. Upon his return to California he proceeded to take steps to acquire a grant of land in the Valle de San Jose' which had so impressed him upon his first arrival in California.¹⁵ To acquire title to land it was necessary to become a Mexican citizen and therefore changed his name to Don Juan Jose' Warner.

When Don Juan Jose' and his wife Anita first moved to the ranch in 1844, they occupied an adobe building at the Hot Springs which now is incorporated into one of the cottages at the resort.¹⁶ They lived there for a year or more, while they constructed the ranch house and trading post about four miles from the springs, and away from the interference by the Indians who gathered at the springs as their ancestors had for centuries past. The location of the new

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ranch house was at the fork in the road which divided the traffic to Los Angeles and San Diego.¹⁷ Vague references and structural evidence indicate that possibly the Trading Post proper was housed in what now is the Barn and that the Ranch House was the family residence. Further archiological and historical research will be required to establish the facts.

Warner became envolved and suffered unjust treatment at the hands of the U. S. Military because of his Mexican citizenship and his personal friendship with the Pico family cast suspicion upon his American loyalty.¹⁸

The U. S. Army of the West, under General Stephen Watts Kearny and under the guidance of Kit Carson, heading¹⁹ for the occupation of California came by way of Warner's Ranch. But at the time of the arrival of the dragoons, Warner was being held in jail in San Diego by Lt. Archibald Gillespie, on charges of consorting with the enemy though it was well known that he was a confidential agent of U. S. Consul, Thomas O. Larkin.

The diary of Brevet Major W. H. Emory¹⁹ describes the arrival of the weary dragoons at the ranch and their resusitation from meat and supplies acquired at the ranch. After a day of rest at the ranch, on December 4, 1846, Kearny broke camp and proceeded on to engage the Californians under Andres Pico in the Battle of San Pasqual, which turned out to be a decidedly one sided victory for the natives. Eighteen Americans were killed, including Captain Johnson, second in command; and thirteen others were wounded including General Kearny.²⁰ However, with relief from San Diego and superior resources at the disposal of the Americans, the Californians became disorganized and retreated toward Los Angeles, while Kearny proceeded to San Diego.

On January 21, 1847, Lt. Colonel Philip St. George Cook, commanding the famous Morman Battalion, came west over the pass into Valle de San Jose' and camped near the ranch house and trading post. Warner was reported as most co-operative and traded²¹ fresh and well trained horses and mules for desert-jaded animals.

During January of 1849 another expedition of the U. S. Army, under command of General Joseph Love, camped for a brief period at Warner's Ranch and exchanged "twelve or fifteen starved and broken

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down mules" for "Six or eight" fresh horses and mules.²² A contingent under Lt. Givens, was assigned to follow the main body for the purpose of rounding up stray animals.²³ On arriving at Warner's Ranch and spotting the Army animals, the Lt. placed Warner under arrest charged with stealing U. S. Property, forced him to leave his sick wife and daughter, and took him to Los Angeles where he was placed in jail, incommunicado, until friends prevailed upon the Military to release him on bond.

The unequivocal outcome of both arrests was not made of record, which later was used by political enemies to harass Warner in the political campaign of 1859, at which time he was elected to the State Assembly.

In 1850 he was elected to the State Senate and left the trading post and ranch in charge of his foreman, Bill Marshall, who allied himself with Indian Chief Antorio Garra, Jr.²⁴ Garra had become embittered toward the Americans because of unjust tax assessments by the San Diego County Sheriff which depleted his herd of cattle and took his grievance to other chiefs who elected to rebel with Garra as Chief. Bill Marshall secretly joined in with the rebels as "campaign" manager and Warner's ranch was selected as the first target. Warner under-estimated the strength of the Indians and, unaware of the duplicity of Marshall, was caught unprepared on the night of November 27, 1851.²⁵

During the raid all of Warner's livestock was stolen and the ranch house and trading post were demolished and burned.²⁶ Major General Joshua H. Bean, with a detachment of California Militia, pursued the renegades, captured the leaders and six of them including Marshall and Garra were executed after due trial.²⁶

Warner was not able to recover from this financial loss and moved to Los Angeles where he became a newspaper correspondent, and later a publisher and politician.²⁷ He later visited the ranch but never again resided there.²⁸

On September 16, 1858, Butterfield's Overland Mail Company began operation with Warner's Ranch as a way-station. The buildings were still in ruins from the Indian raid and had to be rebuilt for the purpose.²⁹ Warner was elated over this, although he had lost direct control of the ranch.³⁰

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The hazards of the southern route, due to the Confederate activities, caused the discontinuance of Butterfield Stages over that route on April 5, 1861.

During the Civil War, Colonel James H. Carelton organized and led a force of more than two thousand officers and men from California to New Mexico in support of the Union.³¹ Camp Wright was established at Warner's Ranch, about one mile west of the ranch house, for the final staging of the expedition before departing from California.

Approximately one and one half miles, southerly, on the old San Felipe road is located the ruins of the Kimble-Wilson Building (CAL-426). William Lawton Wright has proven, without doubt, that this establishment did not exist until five years after the discontinuance of the Butterfield stages over the southern route, and so, erroneously, has been marked as a Butterfield Station.³² The logs of distances between stations, also, verify the error, which had been perpetuated by Henry Wilson, who operated a merchantile store in the building from 1875 until 1908. This building has also served as a rural schoolhouse and as living quarters. Tax records in San Diego County refer only to improvements in connection with this property and not to any real estate, so, apparently while situated on the Warner Ranch holdings, title to land was not envolved in connection with this establishment, which consisted of at least two buildings.³²

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The surviving buildings at the ranch and trading post consist of a one-story adobe ranch house and a barn (CAL-425) constructed of hand hewn timber frame with remnants of adobe walls that are covered with board and batten weather boarding.

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions:- Approximately 47' x 42' with 6' veranda on north side and a 12' x 15' board and batten store room addition at northwest corner.

Wall Construction - General - 22" thick, sundried adobe blocks set in adobe mortar.
Southwest room unusual board and girt bearing wall construction.
Northwest storeroom addition - board and batten frame construction.

Porches - Veranda extends the full length of building on north side with T&G wood flooring and shed roof supported by wood posts. Concrete stoop and two steps at main entrance on east side.

Chimneys - Metal covered.

Doorways and Doors - Wood bucks and frames and job-made wood doors of various design. Six exterior doors. Transom over main entrance.

Windows - Wood windows of various design and size. Only one double hung window in building - a 2/2, 3'-8" by 5'-6" - in Living Room.

Roof - Gable roof over main element with shed roof at south side and lean-to at north side, all covered with corrugated iron over wood shakes. Early description of building had thatch on the roof.

Cornice - Simple barge board and eaves board with extending sheathing boards and rafters.

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Miscellaneous - Alterations are evidenced by openings that have been closed in. Construction indicates that south and north lean-tos were additions to original building.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan - Main central element consists of two rooms with the main entrance at the east elevation opening directly into one room; and the Living Room with fireplace on west wall flanked by doorway at south side and double hung window at north side.

To the south, one room opens from the east room and two rooms open from the Living Room. The floor elevation of the southeast room is down $2\frac{1}{2}$ "; that of the center room is 7" higher than the Living Room; and that of the southwest room is 3" higher than the Living Room.

To the north of the main element are three rooms and a board and batten supply room. The floor elevation of the central room, which has been used as a kitchen, is up one inch, and that to the west is down one inch. The north veranda is 13" lower than the kitchen floor level.

Flooring - 1 x 6 T&G over sleepers, leveled up over graded earth and stepped down to follow general slope of terrain which is approximately 1 foot in 16 feet from south to north.

Walls - Interior walls are adobe with painted plaster finish. Where board and batten bearing walls are noted the walls are lined with muselin and papered.

Ceilings - Main element east room has exposed peeled log ceiling beams approximately 6" diameter, leveled off at top and covered with $1\frac{1}{4}$ " thick random width, 6" to 10", plank decking.

The Living Room has same ceiling construction except that painted canvass is secured to stripping on underside of ceiling beams.

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Ceiling in Kitchen is 1 x 6 center bead T&G, painted, secured to underside of sloping rafters.

Room at northeast corner has ceiling of painted 1 x 6 boards secured to underside of sloping rafters.

All other rooms have painted muselin ceiling secured to underside of sloping rafters and ceiling joists.

Doorways and Doors - Door frames are structural 3" x 6" members with applied stops and trim.

Doors are job made of various laminated plank design and in general, 6'-4" or 6'-6" high. Transom 14" high over entrance door at east elevation.

Trim - In general, wood trim is of soft wood of plain design except at entrance door to east room of central element where the trim at the inside is deeply moulded from 1" x 4".

Hardware - Various thumb latches, and rim locks. Pin hinges.

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